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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined outcomes of a professional-development program designed to help department heads in Ontario, Canada, facilitate change in secondary schools. Department heads in three schools in two Roman Catholic school districts in Ontario participated in the program. The heads were faced with implementing change as a part of the Ministry of Education's move from top-down to school-based management. Data were derived from observation and interviews with department heads. Whether the program was successful in facilitating change in the three schools was difficult to determine. However, it did provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on the educational context and ways to revise the operation of that context. The program also provided support for a change in the role of department heads. It is recommended that organizational structures be revised to provide a more active and sustained role for department heads, helping them become more collaborative and less managerial. Second, secondary school administrators must perceive the heads as part of a decision-making team. Finally, school district administrators need to define heads as active leaders and provide them with sustained professional-development support. (LMI)

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DEPARTMENT HEADS IN TRANSITION

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Final Report

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DEPARTMENT HEADS IN TRANSITION

Secondary schools are facing significant changes across North America with movements towards destreamed (untracked) classes, an increasing emphasis on learning for understanding, and integrated curricula. For Ontario secondary schools, these changes have been contained in the Transition Years and The Common Curriculum documents published by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Department heads have been viewed as playing a potentially key role in secondary school change. Yet as will be outlined in the literature review, little research has been reported on the actual role of department heads in facilitating change. In this study, we worked with department heads in three schools to learn about their role in facilitating school change, to provide them with a professional development program designed to increase their understanding of the reflective change process, and to gather specific data related to the implementation of the Transition Years and The Common Curriculum.

Literature Review

There are many factors mitigating against change in secondary schools. These schools are generally large and complex organizations with a diversity of goals and objectives (Louis & Miles, 1990). In addition, the traditional departmental structure of secondary schools has a potentially balkanizing effect which further obstructs change. The subject specialization can promote a kind of loyalty or isolationism which restricts teachers' interest or involvement in the wider school environment (see Little, 1992; Hargreaves, 1988).

Paradoxically, while departmental organization is perceived by some to be an obstacle to change, it might also hold the key for facilitating the change process. Successful change is dependent on strong leaders at the school level (Fullan, 1990, 1991; Louis, 1986; Louis & Miles, 1990; Wilson & Corcoran,

1988). Traditionally, school leadership has been synonymous with principal leadership. But even in the unlikely event that secondary school principals did have the expertise to initiate program change and teacher development in a multitude of different subject areas, they hardly have the time (Louis and Miles, 1990).

Department heads are better positioned to facilitate change than secondary principals. First, the department head has responsibility for and to a much smaller group of people than a principal. The support and pressure necessary for change could be made more strongly and effectively by a department head working with a small number of teachers than by a principal working with a total staff. Secondly, the department membership is often central to teacher's professional identity (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1990). Departments vary widely, as do individual teachers' perceptions of them. Often, however, teachers within a department share subject area loyalty and expertise (McCammon, 1992) as well as a political interest when it comes to competition for resources (Little, 1992). Department heads are thus likely to find themselves in a position to benefit from a preexisting sense of community and unity of purpose within the department. Third, research indicates that it is often within the department that attempts to influence instructional practice have been brought to bear in secondary schools. As Johnson indicates, "To the extent that high school teachers worked together on improving their practice, it was primarily within departments that they did so" (1990, p. 174).

Although the department head may be in a position to facilitate change, there is very little evidence to suggest that they in reality carry out this role. In the few studies that do mention the role of department head, the general consensus seems to be that the role is ill-defined and widely variable (Little, 1990; Little, 1988; Johnson, 1990; Gorman, 1982). Sometimes the role of department head includes teacher evaluation or collaboration in the development of curriculum, functions central to bringing about the changes that restructuring implies; in other cases it does not. Indeed, as Little (1990) notes, the department head's role "is most variable precisely in those areas that have greatest potential

import for teachers' classroom performance" (p. 215). Thus while there is a great potential for a department head to become "an agent and promoter of change" (Mildwood & Hillier, 1987, p.5), it is not apparent that the necessary awareness and understanding is in place to realize this goal. Indeed, these "microprocesses of change are probably the most neglected aspects of research on high schools" (Fullan, 1990, p. 253).

This study is the second study in a research program on the role of secondary school department heads. The first study (Hannay, 1992; Hannay & Denby, 1993) was a descriptive study which interviewed 35 department heads in 14 schools as to the role and functions of department heads. In that study, the evidence suggested that while department heads wanted to perform a more active change agent role, they had little knowledge of how to best accomplish this goal. In addition, the data pointed to a lack of process facilitation by the department heads with little involvement in curriculum implementation or staff development. This study is built on the knowledge gained through the descriptive study and was designed to assist department heads to become more active change agents while concurrently learning more about that role. We worked with department heads in three schools in two different Ontario Boards of Education. In all cases, superintendents at the boards involved contacted the researcher requesting the intervention.

Methodology

This study is grounded in a naturalistic research design as the intent was to work with the participants in helping them adapt their role as department heads while concurrently studying the effects upon the participants.

Intervention

As with most interventions by an OISE Field Centre, the intent of this project was two-fold. First, in response to the request emanating from the school districts, the field development component of this project involved a series of workshops designed to help the participants enhance a reflective

approach to facilitating school-based change. This program was developed individually for each site with involvement from the participants. Secondly, the research component involved attempting to understand how this program was impacting on the participants and their view of the change initiatives they were facing.

Sample

Three schools from two Roman Catholic school districts were involved. The school districts all requested the involvement of the Midwestern Centre, OISE. All schools were small to mid-size secondary schools serving large geographical areas. All department heads[1] from the three schools were included in the sample.

Data Collection

Interviews were the main data collection source though field notes were maintained on interactions with the participants when possible. The interviews were open-ended in order to gain the participants' perspectives on the changes occurring in their role as department heads and to the teaching and learning processes in their schools. The interviews were taped and transcribed. The quotes used in this report are coded by school [letter] and by respondent [number]. The coding is included in each quote except where it might identify the respondent.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed for patterns which might explain the events occurring in each site. The patterns that emerged assisted in explaining why something happened or did not happen in each site.

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[1] While the term department head is used throughout this report for consistency, other terms were employed in the schools.

Findings

This field development/research report describes the initial forays in a journey of change. As with all change journeys, it is one that was messy, fraught with fear, blind alleys, and panoramic views. This particular journey was more akin to the explorers investigating a new continent as few maps existed, the landscape was new and frequently daunting as the mountain passes or river fords were not readily apparent. Moreover this journal was begun without a reliable compass and only occasional glimpses at the stars from which to plot the course.

The journey referred to in this report concerns both changes in the nature of secondary school education being experienced in Ontario and the changes in governance at the school and provincial levels. Both of these initiatives were experienced simultaneously by the participants and interacted to foster the sense of confusion and frustration initially described by the participants. The following account attempts to describe the experiences of 18 department heads and school administrators in three different schools.

Developing new approaches to decision-making

The intent of this project was to assist department heads in enhancing their change facilitation skills in order that they could facilitate the implementation of the changes in secondary school education outlined in the Transition Years and The Common Curriculum documents. Many of the early frustrations expressed by the participants concerned both the changes in governance being pursued by the Ministry of Education and the need for governance change at their school if they were to be active change agents.

A move away from top-down decision-making

The past experience of the participants involved expecting the Ministry of Education to provide prescriptive curriculum expectations for schools. In the last round of curricular change in the mid-1980s, Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions (OS:IS) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984), the expectations for student programs and curricular guides had been clearly defined and prescribed. The current change initiatives outlined in the Transition Years and The Common Curriculum, differed

radically from past practices as they required that individual schools and school districts develop school organizational structures, evaluation policies, and curricular expectations.

The shift from top-down to school-based caused a great deal of frustration in the early stages of this change journey. In the initial professional development sessions, participants constantly complained about the lack of directions and expectations:

> I think we are running into a lack of direction. We're used to direction.... [Now] you're jumping off a cliff.... [A3]

> We were given no direction, the Ministry is not giving anybody a direction and that is a big concern.... There's no curriculum, there are no textbooks to teach integrated ideas. [B10]

> [I am feeling] frustrated because we still haven't seen the outcomes specifics. Of course, teachers are always concerned with specifics and we were promised them in the fall and this is January so people are getting worried. [A2]

> You would be half way through a course and they're going to tell you "Oh, here are your learning outcomes" and maybe they're not the exact type of thing you've been doing. [A1]

Part of the fear towards the lack of direction could certainly be attributed to the previous experience of the participants where they had been given specific curriculum documents. Perhaps, more importantly, the apprehension could be attributed to a concern on the impact on students and on whether the schools would be evaluated on the effectiveness of the change at an early date:

> I just hope that nobody walks in in October, November and expects to see super things going on.... [Expecting] it will be rosy because it won't. [B10]

The combined concerns of a lack of understanding of the Ministry direction, a fear that once they got started in a certain direction that the Ministry would head in another direction, and an apprehension with possible early evaluations of their efforts, all contributed towards the frustration evident during the participants' initial discussions on change.

Towards school-based decision-making

The movement towards a governance model that emphasized school-based decision making meant the schools involved in this project had to adapt their decision-making practices. Of paramount concern was the role of department heads.

At the beginning of this project, most department heads described their role in what might be classified as a traditional department role. This role primarily involved managerial tasks that were concerned with information sharing, budgets, ordering, and the development of courses of study. Few participants talked about their role in terms of actively facilitating change.

Although department heads are given supervision and curriculum implementation responsibilities in the Ontario School Act, what this meant in practice was vague. Part of the difficulty was the board expectations of the department head role was unclear. Several of the participants talked about this lack of clarity:

> Ever since I've become an area chairperson, I've sort of fought for a little autonomy for department heads. There is a real vacuum, at least in our school, there is no defined role for area chairpersons.... That's the board responsibility to flush out these positions. [A1]

> Do we have any real authority? Where does our authority begin and end? Are we allowed to demand? What's the bottom line? That is still up in the air. [A2]

In essence, the participants were being asked to lead the change journey without a road map through which to plot their role or the direction they were heading.

The lack of a clear change agent role description by the school board and the lack of a past history of facilitating change created difficulty in the perceptions of teachers.

> I don't know how much respect the teachers actually have for the department heads. There's some, it is not hard feelings, it's a lack of understanding of what the department head does..... If the area chair is supposed to be involved in these kinds of topics and discussions then to what degree are the staff going to participate? [C6]

Moving towards a more active change agent role, then, required a re-definition of the department head role towards a role that would counter the impression that "we're essentially a powerless group.

We are given leadership over a group of people but no authority" [A1]. The difficulty was compounded in that not only did the department heads need system support in adjusting their role but they needed the school administrators to include them in school-based decision making.

In the schools where the department heads gradually began to assume a more active change agent role, the school administrators actively participated in the process and encouraged shared decision making. This adaptation took time as the participants had to develop new concepts of their roles and to develop a more collaborative style of making decisions. The participants talked about this move towards a collaborative way of operating:

> It is important for us to see that the leadership really means what they are saying and are not just doing lip service to it. But the fact that we met all these times, it can't be a lie because we have gone through all of these discussions and talks. (C6)

> All of a sudden, once we started working together, the puzzle started coming together and there wasn't the fear. [C7]

> I'm feeling comfortable with [the principal] and what's going on with [his/her] attitudes and approaches. [He/she] is pretty open for ideas so that's good. I think as heads are working together which is nice too. [B7]

Where the department heads demonstrated a change facilitation role, they worked with the school principal to develop school based plans for the structures and programs to implement the Transition Years, and to develop a school-based staff development plan. The department head cabinet became a more cohesive group where ideas could be explored and decisions could be made:

> Then we when we went back to the principal, we decided at our school we're going to do it this way. [B9]

> I would say there has been less fearful dialogue. People can get really into things now and the whole process of meeting has broken down the barriers. So there's less fearful dialogue for sure, people can agree to disagree, people can go into depth. With the exception of maybe one person, everybody is on side. [C1]

Where the principal did not share real and meaningful decision making with the department heads, the evidence indicated fewer examples of the department head actively facilitating change. Without an

active decision-making role, the department heads were forced to act either on their own or to revert to a more traditional managerial style.

> You know when there is no structure, no infrastructure is there for people to follow a certain job, sometimes it's easy to just fall back and let the status quo go. [A2]

One participant described a situation where he had assumed a leadership role only to have his efforts thwarted:

> I undertook to convince the administration that we should have department policy [in a certain area] and try to give some of the autonomy to the individual departments. We got a committee going and [developed a policy for departments]. Then to my surprise a few weeks later, another area chairperson and the principal told me it looks like we're going to have a brand new policy.... I said why did we go through months as this committee to develop an in-school policy and then low and behold out of the blue comes another policy which does away totally with everything we were talking about....

In this school, during the interviews, the department heads voiced more concern about the implementation of Transition Years than in the other schools where the cabinet had entered into a more active change agent role.

If principals are not willing to include department heads in the decision-making for change then it seems highly unlikely that department heads could perform a change agent role. In these situations, the principal can create almost unsurmountable barriers.

A developing vision of the Transition Years

When the project first began, the Transition Years was still a vague proposal on the horizon. During the first few months we kept receiving drafts of this document that were being unofficially floated around the educational pipeline in Ontario. Rumors, during this time period, were rife of changes coming that could, in the eyes of the participants, drastically revise the structure of secondary school education.

Consequently, it was not surprising that initially most participants only had a vague understanding of what might be included in the Transition Years. Generally, this policy meant to them that grade nine would be destreamed (untracked). Additionally, most participants were opposed, on educational grounds,

to destreaming as they believed it would not be in the best interests of students. The attitude projected during the first six months of this project, in all three schools, was one of frustration and anger. There was also some resistance to the change initiative being voiced by some participants.

The dialogue encouraged through the professional development sessions and the department head cabinet meetings facilitated a change in attitude towards and understanding of the Transition Years. As one participant described:

> I guess before I saw it more as just a thing to put everyone together. I just saw it more as destreaming. Now I see it more like a whole program -- student oriented and a totally different kind of direction. [C3]

A good number of the participants talked about a reconceptualization of the form and structure of secondary school education, for example:

> I see the body of knowledge changing more to skills than to fixed content amounts. I see teaching and learning styles changing to more student action, interaction and less teacher direction.... I see the teacher as a learner with the students, teacher as director of the action of the students but not the teacher as the fountain of all knowledge because the kids need to go much further. [C1]

> We'll get better students who can cooperate, who can work within groups and who can do problem solving. [A1]

They also realized that implementation of the Transition Years also required a shift in the teaching/learning process:

> I think it's going to be a teaching/learning process for the teachers as well as the students and I think that is what education is all about. So I think teachers are going to have to adapt, students will be adapting to new styles, new teaching methods and the teachers are going to have to professionally develop themselves to deal with those new students and their new abilities. [B8]

Becoming more active change agents

The purpose behind this project was to assist the department heads in becoming more active change agents. Certainly, as described earlier in this report, one factor influencing whether they achieved this goal was the willingness of the principal to share decision-making. In two of the schools, the

evidence suggests that the department heads were generally becoming more proactive, rather than reactive, change facilitators. As one of the school administrators reported:

> They are very much change agents and I have experience with other academic situations in which they're not, in which they have become the last dogs that are hung. Whereas here we have organizational leaders who are running around trying to get people together, trying to hold a few people back because they have a few people who are really gung ho. Really I see them taking over and really showing leadership.

The participants demonstrated their increasing knowledge about the change process through their comments. Overwhelmingly, they identified that this current change was going to require significant time to implement:

> It's going to take a long time, you have to be willing to talk. You can't do it on your own or behind closed doors. You need to be willing to experiment because sometimes that's how you find out whether things work in your classroom and not everybody is willing to do those things and that's where our problems are going to come in. [B7]

> Rather than kind of jump as something, sometimes I take a little more time and just make a comment and let a couple of days to digest and then came back at it. [C3]

> I'm not in a rush anymore. [C6]

In addition to encouraging dialogue on the change initiatives, several department heads indicated they had a clearer understanding of the importance of individual support for teachers involved in the implementation process.

> One of the things I have learned is the idea of being supportive during change and that making mistakes is not a problem. We learn from those mistakes. [C6]

> I've come to a point where I can actually see ways of helping people change, finding the word that will be a clue. Finding the thing that they do well and expanding on that. [C2]

> I saw the department head as kind of mainly paperwork kind of administration and now I can see that there's a lot more to make sure your personnel are happy, more people oriented. [C3]

The department heads often referred to the importance of talk, both to themselves as they worked towards a more active change agent role and to their teachers as they internalized the meaning behind the Transition Years policy:

> Keep talking about it with people that way people get comfortable with it. 'What do you think about this?' 'Do you think you'd be interested in this?' And what I found was that people started coming back to me on their own, I didn't have to chase them. [A2]

> I've learned to listen and let people try. [C5]

> It certainly has given an opportunity to annunciate and to talk about it. Just sitting here to formulate thoughts and concepts is good. [B11]

In addition to their collective role in developing a school based implementation, individual department heads also provided examples of how they were now working with their departments:

> Right now I am thinking of being with my grade 9 teachers and doing some curriculum. Having the whole day to sit down and say 'Alright now, let's go through each unit, let's find out how you did do it, how did you do, and what did you think and what changes shall we make'. [B7]

> We had meetings at 7:30 am with the cluster. We had special meetings, apart for our regular monthly ones in which we tried to determine exactly what we need to do with respect to the Transition Years. [C4]

> I think I made a tiny baby step forward last night when I said to the staff, 'I'm not sure where this is going to end up yet, we're all just taking little steps because we haven't got all the answers, we haven't got all the questions yet so how can we possibly have all the answers?' I said to XXX, just the fact that you're asking the questions allows us to go forward. I don't have the answers but at least we've got some of the questions right. [C2]

Towards the end of the first year, the participants began to voice their need to be actively involved in developing curricula for destreamed and/or integrated grade nine classrooms.

> Between that vision and the actuality of getting programming in place, there's a huge gap. I find myself constantly struggling with, can we use some of these ideas to begin thinking in terms of program? I'm beginning to want to get some order into the curriculum, get some order into the change process. [C1]

> I think there should be more time learning how to write some curriculum. It was always purchase, purchase, purchase and there wasn't a whole lot of time for people to learn how to really assemble it. Implementation was never something considered, it was always just produce a document for show and then it goes from that. Now I think we're going to have to produce a document and we're going to have to put it in place. [C4]

Key in this shift was their willingness to begin thinking about developing curricula at the school level rather than waiting for someone else to provide the documents.

Increasingly the participants became more concerned with professional development. Not only did they perceive the need for increased professional development to assist their staffs in implementing the Transition Years and The Common Curriculum but they also questioned who made decisions concerning and the format of professional development. This was a fundamental shift as they moved towards being more active change agents.

> When there was a PD day, when they did exist, they were one shot deals that were sort of hit and run type of things and there was never really follow through. The concept of professional development fell on either a superintendent or a consultant and there was never the thrust or empowerment for just teachers who had an interest. There was not a lot of follow through even with the ideas that were generated. It is changing. [C4]

Professional development began to be perceived more as an ongoing process that had to be embedded into the fabric of the school. It was also perceived as a more interactive process that involved application not just the acquisition of knowledge or information:

> I have to admit that I find that when it comes to that sort of one day or half day workshops, I find they really don't have that much of an impact but if it's an ongoing thing where people keep in contact with you or keep the ideas in your head like we have done this year, that's much more important. [A2]

> Maybe our professional development has to be considered more like a course, it's ongoing, and with the opportunity to demonstrate how it can be applied. [C4]

Forms other than a workshop format began to be viewed as useful professional development:

> I think the biggest thing is professional development and networking. Teachers need to network, not just with one another in their own schools but across schools. We need to stop being so insulated from one another. [C2]

In two of the schools involved in this study, the department heads and the school administrators worked together to develop a professional development process that would begin to incorporate some of these ideas. They wanted to ensure that professional development was an ongoing and linked program with all sessions building on preceding sessions. In addition, they looked at ways they could assist teachers in *applying* the ideas to their daily practice and they sought in-school time to accomplish the transfer

process. The department heads and the school administrators sought time to allow this to happen through departmental meetings, staff meetings, and professional development days.

Facilitating a change in department head role

As noted earlier in this paper, it was the role of the principal which was the key variable in whether the department heads as a group became active change agents. However, the process was partly facilitated through the professional development program that was offered in both sites. In one instance, this program was offered to one school while in the other, the department heads and representatives of the school administration from both schools attended the sessions. In both sites, supervisory officers were frequent participants in the sessions.

To some extent, especially at the beginning, the participants were disappointed in the professional development program offered as they wanted specific answers from which to implement the Transition Years and The Common Curriculum. The difficulty with an expert defining the recipe is described by Deal (1990):

> There are unlimited numbers of experts who appear to have the answers. Their answers are managerial recipes that outline how changes should be made. The problem is that most recipes will not work. Recipes fail because they do not take into account either the working mental maps of educators responsible for transitions or the local terrain in which the changes are being made. All strategies reflect the assumptions of the people who develop them. We need to begin our search for better approaches to change with an examination of the various perspectives that influence our initial questions, our formulation of key issues, our remedies and our assessment of how well changes have worked. (p. 145)

Yet the purpose of the program was to focus on assisting the participants in thinking about both the nature of the changes they were attempting to implement and the process of change. The process involved in this program was designed to help them move away from a reliance on outside experts and be able to develop courses of action that best fit their context.

In some ways, the incongruity between the initial expectations of the participants and the intent of the program was the same as the attitude towards expecting the Ministry to provide them with a

prescriptive curriculum document. The form and purpose of the professional development program offered was not to provide recipes but to provide the participants with ways of reflecting on how they could facilitate change which ran contrary to their past experiences with professional development. Consequently, this program involved a reconceptualization of the meaning of professional development from something that was done "at" or "for" you to one that provided opportunities for the participants to actively engage in a reflective process directly tied to action.

The nature of the professional development program

The content of the formal professional development sessions included a series of conceptual lenses. The conceptual lenses were intended as a means of helping the participants reflect on the changes they were pursuing at the school level through a series of reflective and collaborative dialogues. The conceptual lenses were never intended to provide recipes or maps for school change.

Fullan (1991) suggests that those interested in promoting change need to consider both the nature of the change and the process of change. Generally speaking, the conceptual lenses fell into these two categories. The curriculum orientations lens, developed by Miller and Seller (1985), was introduced to help the participants reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of what they were trying to accomplish in their school project. Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) concept of personal practical knowledge was employed to help participants consider the personal beliefs of teachers and to identify how to best assist those teachers in a change process. Other conceptual lenses directly related to the process of change were introduced, including the dimensions of change (Fullan & Park, 1981); the concerns-based adoption model (Hall and Loucks 1978); the functions of professional development (Schlechty & Whitford, 1983); alternative forms of professional development (Hannay, 1990; Seller, 1993); and deliberative reflection (Hannay, in press).

The conceptual lenses were only intended to provide a venue through which the participants could develop a common language to discuss the changing nature of secondary school education and the process

of facilitating change; and through which they could develop a shared meaning for their context. Hence during each of the formal sessions, the department heads and the school administrators spent most of their time discussing their context and the changes anticipated.

Reaction and impact to the professional development program

As noted earlier, at first the participants wanted specific answers and techniques to implement the Transition Years, for example:

> [The program] was more focused on change in the sense of managing change per se rather than in a specific way directed at the Transition Years policy itself. [B5]

This is often the first reaction to a change process as if the change can be facilitated as easily as possible then such action only makes sense (Hannay, in press).

However, the participants also talked about the importance of the dialogue that they had during the sessions:

> Just being able to express it and get it off our chests and say okay we've studied it, we've done with it and now I can move it. [B7]
>
> It's been good to have another forum to discuss the issues in. [A1]
>
> I think the fact that we've been going to these meetings with yourself and talking to other teachers and just giving it time to seep in seems it's opened my eyes a little bit. [A2]

Often this dialogue was animated and intense as individuals struggled with their conceptions of secondary school education. It was crucial that individuals were able to express themselves freely and enter into a collaborative discussion on what they felt was the best choices for their schools.

Through the dialogue, the school teams began to develop a common view of where they were heading and this view was not laid on by the school board administrators or the outside facilitator. Also in the process they began to focus on asking the most appropriate questions rather than just searching for 'quick fix' solutions:

> I know I felt initially very much like I had been cast adrift on a very stormy sea and [the project began] and suddenly there was at least a direction to the storm. I had a sense that the wind was at least blowing consistently, I could find a way through the stormy waters.

> You didn't calm the waves but at least you enabled me to find a way through the waves. It is not that you came in and imposed answers or gave us answers, you came in and helped us ask the right questions. [C2]

> You're like a string. We are following a string through a jungle type of thing or holding onto a rope so that we don't stray. Before it was just everyone working with English was doing their thing; math was doing their thing and so on. But now there's a rope or focus or strand. By necessity it's helped actually coordinate our thoughts. If this wasn't happening, I suppose we'd always be running around like a bunch of chickens with our heads cut off. [C4]

> We're high school people and the game is changing. I think as long as we keep on the agenda that change can be embraced and that we can be empowered by it, we don't have to have the answers. What we have to do is keep the questions focused.... [C7]

Whether this professional development program was successful in facilitating change in how the three schools operate in the future is not possible to judge at this point as the data was collected early in the process. Perhaps, it did provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their context and ways to revise the operations of that context. It also did provide some ways and support for a change in the role of department heads. As one school administrator claimed as a result of this project:

> Really I see them taking over and really showing the kind of leadership that wouldn't necessarily have happened if they hadn't had the stroking and reinforcement about their own professionalism.

Summary

This study reports on a beginning stage of a journey that involved rethinking the basic meanings of the department head role and the purpose of secondary school education. The participants had not arrived nor even determined their destination when the data was collected and they are still engaged in the process of searching for the right questions to ask and the solutions best suited to their context. It was a journey that was started without maps or directions. Yet the participants wanted to know whether to turn right or left, head east or west, and when to settle in a certain location. It was a journey for explorers not settlers and one that the participants showed great courage in beginning.

Implications

The findings from this study are not necessarily generalizable to others searching for answers to the myriad of questions being asked about secondary school education. However, as discussed below, it raises some points of discussion for secondary school change.

Perhaps the most important factor we learned about through this study was if department heads are to become active change agents, then the decision making structures of secondary schools might have to be adapted. Organizational structures in secondary schools might have to be adjusted to provide both an opportunity and a responsibility for decision making for department heads. A revised structure would entail a more active and sustained role for department heads; a role that requires they act more as facilitators rather than focusing on managerial items. This suggests that they would have to work in tandem with principals and members of their department. In this, department heads would work collaboratively with school administrators not only to implement but conceptualize the nature of the changes being proposed for their schools. It also suggests that *all* department heads would have to collaborate with each other and the school administrators to facilitate the school-wide changes. As such, the department heads and school administrators would have to act as a team in order to implement and facilitate school-based initiatives.

If secondary schools are to operate this way then it also entails several other changes. Notably, it will require that secondary school administrators might have to change their roles. In this study, when the school administrators worked with department heads to make and enact decisions, the department heads performed a more active change agent role. Where the principal did not allow such collaboration, the department heads were not permitted to be a change agent.

Secondary school administrators need to perceive the department heads as part of a team that will guide the direction of the school. It might be necessary to use the department head cabinet in different ways. This group could be a powerful source of facilitating school change but only if the group meets

on a regular basis, has a defined decision-making role that goes beyond low level managerial concerns, and is actively involved in taking action on the decisions made.

If this subtle but powerful change in the department head role is to happen, it will require that school systems establish role definitions that involve active leadership by the department heads. Without such an expectation, the department head is left in no man's land as teachers and school administrators might be unclear as to the role. The importance of a system expectation was clearly established by Brown (1994) in which she identified department heads as part of the team which provided transformational leadership in one school district. In this situation, the school system clearly expected the department heads to be change agents. A revised department head role, then, needs to be clearly articulated and supported by the school district if department heads are to facilitate secondary school change.

Concurrently, the school district needs to provide sustained professional development that will assist the department heads in learning how to facilitate change. While the department heads need to learn about the specifics of the proposed changes, additionally they need to understand how to help others learn about and implement changes in their practice. The professional development program cannot be a collection of recipes on facilitating change but should provide the participants with knowledge from which they can design the recipes for their school context. The professional development program needs to provide ample time for dialogue; assist the participants in enhancing their understanding of the change process; and provide them with ways to apply this to their context. Such a program could, if supported by the school administrators and the school district, empower the department heads collectively to make knowledgeable decisions on what is best for their school and their departments.

In conclusion, this study has provided a glimpse into the processes through which the department heads in three schools began a journey to change secondary school education. It has indicated some

issues that need to be considered by individual department heads, school administrators, and central office administrators if department heads are to facilitate secondary school change. The study suggests that:

- roles need to change, both for department heads and school administrators;
- the department role needs to be clearly defined at the system and school level;
- professional development opportunities that focus on facilitating reflective change need to be provided for department heads and school administrators;
- ongoing application and institutional support needs to be provided for individuals involved in organizational change in secondary schools.

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